

CosmoPoles

A Mixed Methods Study on the European Identity of Higher Educated Polish Youth

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Abstract

Through the combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses, this study investigates the extent to which a European identity has emerged across Europe and what it means to 'be European' for higher educated Polish youth. The results of a quantitative comparative analysis (multilevel regression analysis on *Eurobarometer* survey data) are complemented with results from a qualitative inquiry that was conducted in the framework of the same research project. It is argued that national and European political identifications are not mutually exclusive but rather seem to complement each other (both quantitatively and qualitatively). It is further argued that mixed methods research designs offer a promising approach to the study of collective identities and Europeanisation.

1 Introduction

Walking through Warsaw in December 2007, a quote on a billboard caught my attention:

We reject the notion of losing our sovereignty, ... we also reject the idea of a federal super-state. ... We reject the idea of European citizenship. ... We want to keep our frontiers. ... Once inside the EU, within a few years we will have been radically bought out and deprived of our national identity. (Barski and Lipkowski 1996)

This excerpt is a clear example of the political rhetoric that is very commonly used all over Europe by people opposing European integration. Becoming more 'European' is held to be synonymous with becoming less 'national', instrumentally employing a dichotomy in both space and time. In public debate the European Union is often depicted as an undemocratic, cumbersome institution, threatening the sovereignty and identity² of the nation-states within. '[M]any groups of people among the member nations perceive the EU as a political organization which diminishes national state sovereignty, and [these groups] resist the EU's efforts at the creation of a "European identity" as directly at odds with their own, superordinate national identities' (Wilson 1996:208). This perceived threat does not only exist in politics, but has also been shown to be present in the media and society at large (see, for example, Lubbers 2008; Van Os 2008). The Dutch and French referenda in 2005 rejecting the proposed European constitution and the rejection of the revised constitutional treaty in Ireland in 2008 are still vividly present in Europe's recent political memory. In addition, European extreme-right wing politicians have thrived in recent years, in part simply by evoking these images of 'Europe', urging people to 'stand up' for their country's independence (see McGuinness 1996:64-79).

And yet, in contrast to what these outcomes might seem to suggest, '[s]upport for membership of the European Union is at its highest in over a decade' (European Commission 2007:22). In a recent *Eurobarometer* report on the topic published by the European Commission,³ on average fifty-eight per cent of all European citizens support their country's EU membership, and there are no countries where support falls behind of opposition (*ibid.*). Paradoxically, countries that may seem most eurosceptic in political discourse and media coverage often actually show the *highest* levels of public support. France and the Netherlands are notoriously remembered for rejecting the proposed constitution, but both have levels of public support comfortably above the EU average. The Netherlands even ranks second (seventy-nine per cent) of all European nations. For Poland, recently portrayed as a new-found eurosceptic nation because of political debacles over various European issues (BBC News 2006a, 2006b, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c; Jasińska-Kania and Marody 2004:230; Kropiwnicki 2007; Morris 2004; Repa 2006), the *Eurobarometer* report shows similarly high support (seventy-one per cent).

Where does this ambiguity come from? Certainly, 'many groups of people' perceive the EU as a threat (Wilson 1996:208), but *exactly which* groups of people do and do not feel this way? *Why* do they perceive this threat, and precisely *how* do they construct their national and, perhaps, European identities? Is 'Europe' only perceived to be a threat to national sovereignty or are people's opinions and attitudes not that consistent after

all? In a rapidly evolving Europe these questions call for extensive and thorough answers. Providing these answers systematically requires a specific methodology, combining the 'width' of quantitative research and the strategic 'depth' of qualitative inquiry (see Tashakkori and Creswell 2007 on mixed methods research questions).

Earlier studies have often focused on the 'top-down' constructions of 'Europe' and its identity by the political elites (cf. Shore 2000) or on symbolic and political representations of Europe and the nation-state (cf. McNeill 2004). The present article concentrates on 'bottom-up' identification with Europe, and does so through two distinct approaches. First, as McNeill points out: 'Europeanization may be simultaneously welcomed and fiercely resisted by different groups in the same national society' (2004:37). Therefore, I will analyse to which extent 'European identification' exists, and according to which individual and national determinants it is distributed across the European Union. This will be achieved through a quantitative multilevel analysis of Eurobarometer data. Second, in order to understand which social constructions of Europe and the nation-state underlie these ambiguous and sometimes paradoxical attitudes, it is necessary to comprehend what being or feeling 'European' actually *means* to the people expressing such feelings. This will be examined through the use of a case study based on qualitative data gathered between October 2007 and February 2008 among Polish higher educated youth.

2 Theories on Europeanisation and Collective Identities

European social, economic, political, and cultural life has been organised for most of the last century through the concept of the nation-state (McNeill 2004:36; Murray 1998:43). Economically, but also politically and socially, these nation-states are now growing closer together. This changes the way we think about what a nation-state is and what 'national identity' entails. It also makes us wonder about where the 'boundaries of Europe' are and who is distinctly 'different' from 'us'. However, despite suggestions that we are witnessing the 'death of the nation-state' in Europe, it not only remains the primary unit of societal organisation; it also continues to shape collective identities to an extent that is not likely to be overshadowed by any form of European identification in the foreseeable future (see Calhoun 2007, chapter two; McNeill 2004:36). Europeanisation intensifies flows across European borders, but it doesn't necessarily makes them matter less (cf. Appadurai 2005; Calhoun 2007:9). The imagination and social construction of Europe and its nations is affected—not their legitimacy or existence.

The theoretical starting point for empirically capturing European identification is often earlier work on identification with the nation-state. Crucial to such approaches is often that identification as a process always requires a significant 'Other' for subsequent self-definition (see Barth 1969; Blok 2000; De Swaan 2001; Erikson 1968; Jenkins 2004). The most commonly suggested 'Others' for an emerging European identity are the United States, Russia, and more recently Islam and/or the Middle East (see Adamson 2004; Balch 2005; Benthall 2004; Grillo 2004; Strasser 2008). Some have proposed that Eastern and Western Europe can be seen as each other's Others (Kuus 2004), or that European nation-states are constructed in opposition to Europe, and vice versa (Carey 2002). Nevertheless, prior empirical studies refuted such theories and often found *positive* correlations between national and European identifications (Bruter 2003:1154; see also Duchesne and Frogner 2008; McLaren 2002, 2004). In fact, as Hutchinson argues, 'many, if not most, European national identities have been developed either alongside or in relation to a sense of Europeaness' (2003:37). Therefore, instead of looking at Europeanisation as the inevitable demise of the European nation-state, we should focus on the 'more complex political process of repositioning, remapping, and rebranding of the nation-state' (McNeill 2004:36-37).

Earlier work on the topic by Michael Bruter (2003, 2004) makes a very useful distinction between a 'civic' and a 'cultural' component of European political identity. By *civic identity*, Bruter means 'the degree to which they feel that they are citizens of a European political system, whose rules, laws, and rights have an influence on their daily life' (2003:1155), which is quite close to Habermas' (1992) idea of a 'constitutional patriotism'. *Cultural identity*, on the other hand, refers to the perceived level of sameness with other Europeans 'regardless of the nature of the political system' (Bruter 2003:1155-56). Bruter further argues that what is most often pursued both theoretically and empirically in academic literature dealing with the emergence of European identification, is in fact the *civic* component (2003:1167-71; see also Loveless and Rohrschneider 2008, paragraph 2.3). A central conclusion that Bruter proposes is that, while the civic component appeals to citizens' reason to a larger extent, the cultural component is more substantially driven by collective symbols and images of Europe (ibid.). In my empirical analyses, I will take Bruter's distinction between a civic and a cultural component of European identification as my main point of departure. I will first quantitatively compare all

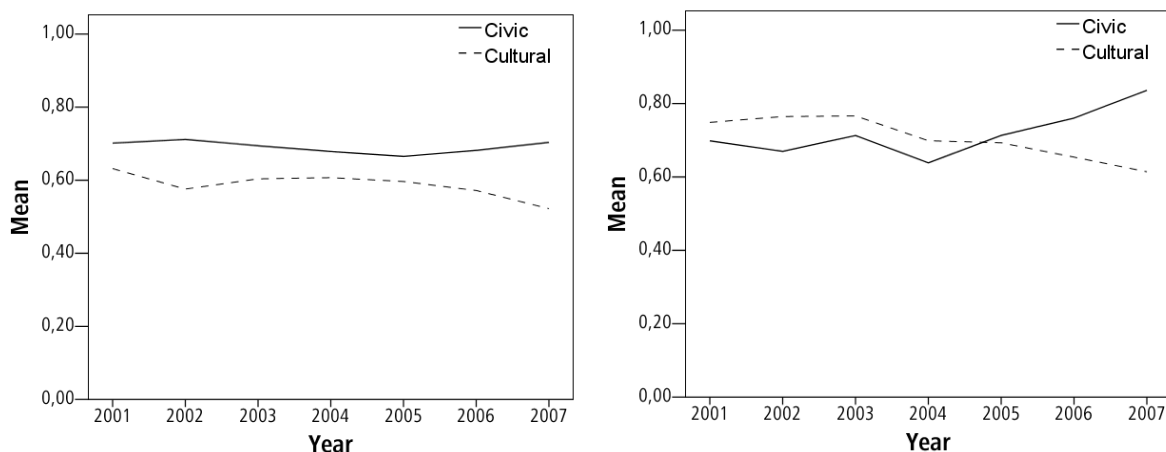
current EU member states on a measurement of identification with Europe. Second, I will provide the results of a more in-depth, qualitative analysis of European identification among higher educated Polish youth.

3 European Identity Cross-Nationally: A Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative analyses provided in this paper are based on two scales constructed from the *Eurobarometer* series data. The first scale is very similar to the one used by Bruter (2005a:198) and Lubbers and Scheepers (2005), and indeed measures European *civic* identification with the EU. This first scale is based on the mean value of two questions. First, the question whether the respondent's country has benefited from EU membership (recoded to range from zero (no benefit) to one). Second, the question whether it is a good or a bad thing that the respondent's country is a member of the EU was recoded to range from zero (bad) to one (good). 'Neither good nor bad' was recoded to 0.5 (cf. Lubbers and Scheepers 2005:240). The second scale, measuring cultural identification with Europe, was constructed based on two *Eurobarometer* questions. First, I included people's 'attachment' to Europe. Additionally, I included the item measuring how 'proud to be European' people reported to be. Both variables were recoded to range from 0 (no attachment/pride) to 1 (highest degree of attachment/pride), and the mean of these two values was taken as the scale for cultural European identification. A confirmatory factor analysis revealed that the four items used to measure European identity could indeed be divided into two distinct factors and the two scales form reliable scales.⁴ There is a positive correlation between the scales ($R=0.334$, $p < 0.01$), which is not very surprising; people identifying more strongly with Europe can be expected to support its political and economic integration.

The EU experienced its largest expansion in history between 2001 and 2007. Also, several countries 'physically' enforced the provisions of the Schengen Treaty (i.e. 'opening' borders), and/or introduced the Euro in this period. The development of respondent's civic and cultural attitudes towards Europe between 2001 and 2007 is shown in the graphs below.⁵ These trends are depicted for Europe as a whole (left) and Poland in particular (right). As we can see for the EU as a whole, both identification components remained relatively stable in this timeframe. This pattern is quite similar to that of most 'old' EU members. In Poland, up until 2004 the level of cultural identification with Europe was actually higher than the level of civic identification (one of the very few countries where this was the case). In 2004, the year of accession for many new EU member states in Central and Eastern Europe, the graph for Poland shows the start of quite a strong increase in civic identification, overtaking cultural identification, which slightly declined.

Figure 1 - Civic and cultural identification with Europe between 2001-2007 for EU27 (left) and Poland (right).



This development can be explained by seeing it in the light of Poland's rhetorical 'return to Europe' (see Aniot 1997; Mach 1993a, 1997, 2000, 2001; Maier and Risse 2003). I would argue that before Poland's EU accession (2004), people tended to express a relatively high level of *cultural* identification with Europe because it allowed them to (1) identify with a positively evaluated group (cf. Tajfel and Turner 1979), and (2) assert boundaries towards one of Poland's historical and most significant European Others: Russia (Zarycki 2004). After 2004 this cultural identification decreased somewhat towards the EU average. The civic component then took over much of this identification, which makes sense, as Polish citizens actually *became* European citizens in the legal sense of the word. Difference did not need to be asserted through a cultural attachment to 'Europe' anymore; they had 'hard proof' of their Europeanness. The boundaries had become more clear (cf. Blok 2000). These changes through time show how the *discourse* on Polish Europeanness has changed. Where Poles in general would first express it through a *cultural* discourse, EU accession gave them other, *civic* means by which they

could assert their European identity, simultaneously reaffirming their difference towards 'less European' nations (e.g. Russia and Belarus; see Zarycki 2004).

3.1 Who Feels European?

The level of *civic* identification may have various different causes, ranging from a respondent's political attachment to Europe (Lubbers and Scheepers 2005; McLaren 2002), to her judgement on the EU's achievements in specific policy areas (Lubbers and Scheepers 2007; Luedtke 2005; Mau 2005). In many of these domains, civic identification has been the (explicit or implicit) subject of a relatively large number of prior studies (e.g. Bruter 2005b; Lubbers and Scheepers 2005, 2007; Luedtke 2005; Mau 2005). Below, I have therefore chosen to focus on the *cultural* component of European identity for my quantitative analysis (see Table 1). The coefficients are based on multilevel regression analysis so as to compare countries within Europe and individuals within countries in a statistically sound way (see Heck and Thomas 2000; Kreft and De Leeuw 1998; Snijders and Bosker 1999).

The 'null-model' (model 1) in Table 1 shows that there is sufficient variance across countries on the dependent variable to justify multilevel analysis. The subsequent models include individual level variables, and models 6 and 7 include national level characteristics as well. Finally, the improvement of the $-2 \log \text{likelihood}$ indicates the increasingly better fit of the models to the data (lower is better). Below, I will consecutively discuss the effect on expressed cultural identification of a respondent's age, education, their political orientation, their social position, and their identification with the nation-state. Then, I will examine how national characteristics affect levels of cultural identification with Europe. There, I will first go into the varying effects of national identity and political (left-right) orientation in different countries, and then test the effect of the duration of a country's EU membership and its post-socialist past.

3.1.1 Individual characteristics

There are two concerns regarding the effect for age. Firstly, younger people *as a generation* were born in a globalised, transnational era, which arguably makes them more flexible in cross-national exchange than people from earlier generations. Secondly, prior research has suggested that younger people tend to respond more flexible to social change (*cf.* Lubbers 2008; Lubbers and Scheepers 2007). Considering Poland's communist experience, its subsequent national independence, and its recent accession to the EU makes for a radically changing political context. The more elaborate models corroborate these argumentations, as they show that older people are less likely than younger people to express a cultural identification with Europe.⁶

Regarding the respondents' level of education, there are four arguments that I would like to present. First, I argue that higher educated people are more likely to entertain transnational social networks than lower educated people because their jobs are more likely to require that. This in turn leads to the need for acquiring a cultural framework that is adapted to such a context (Ultee 1989:15). Such a framework could evoke the experience of 'feeling' European. Second, education can be seen as a proxy for measuring intercultural and language capabilities. Third, higher educated people benefit most directly from cross-border flows of capital, goods and knowledge (Ultee 1989). Finally, higher educated individuals are more likely to participate in, or at least follow debates concerning the EU, which potentially makes them feel more involved with it as well (Inglehart 1970; McLaren 2001:90). These arguments are, indeed, supported by the significant positive regression coefficients for the years of education in models 2 through 7.

Although age and education are two of the most defining characteristics of what it means to be a 'student', it does not cover all aspects of this social role. To account for this, I compared students to other social groups in society. Students are likely to travel more than their non-student counterparts, and participate in international educational networks and programmes (e.g. *Erasmus*). As a result, they maintain more elaborate international networks. A more 'international' orientation should subsequently have a positive effect on their cultural identification with Europe. The regression analysis indeed shows that students express significantly higher levels of cultural identification with Europe than all other groups except managers. This finding also suggests that, while working class Poles also increasingly travel to Western Europe (for labour or otherwise), their identification with Europe did not increase as strongly as it did for the student sector of society.⁷

Table 1 - Multilevel regression models of the cultural component of European identification (0=low – 1=high).

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6		Model 7	
	b	s.e.	b	s.e.	b	s.e.	b	s.e.	b	s.e.	b	s.e.	b	s.e.
Intercept	.590**	.014	.512**	.015	.539**	.015	.279**	.013	.290**	.016	.850**	.117	.329**	.157
Individual characteristics														
<i>Control variables</i>														
Age (0=15)			.000**	.000	.000**	.000	-.001**	.000	-.001**	.000	-.001**	.000	-.001**	.000
Gender (1=female)			-.007**	.002	-.004*	.002	-.006**	.002	-.007**	.002	-.007**	.001	-.007**	.001
Education (years)			.004**	.000	.003**	.000	.003**	.000	.003**	.000	.003**	.000	.003**	.000
Left-right placement (0=left, 9=right)			.008**	.000	.007**	.000	.004**	.000	.004	.003	.004	.003	.004	.003
<i>Social position</i>														
Student (ref.)					(ref.)		(ref.)		(ref.)		(ref.)		(ref.)	
Manager					.015**	.003	.009**	.003	.008**	.003	.008**	.003	.008**	.003
White collar					-.013**	.003	-.013**	.003	-.013**	.003	-.013**	.003	-.013**	.003
Manual labour					-.035**	.003	-.034**	.002	-.034**	.002	-.034**	.002	-.034**	.002
House work					-.032**	.004	-.035**	.003	-.034**	.003	-.035**	.003	-.035**	.003
Unemployed					-.042**	.004	-.034**	.003	-.033**	.003	-.034**	.003	-.034**	.003
Retired					-.011**	.003	-.016**	.003	-.016**	.003	-.018**	.003	-.018**	.003
<i>National identity</i>														
Emotional national identity (0-1)							.389**	.003	.376**	.021	.377**	.021	.376**	.021
Fear loss of national identity (0-1)							-.094**	.002	-.090**	.002	-.091**	.002	-.091**	.002
National characteristics														
Years of EU membership											-.031**	.001	-.031**	.001
<i>Iron Curtain variables</i>														
Former USSR satellite (ref.)													(ref.)	
Former USSR territory													.102~	.268
Never in Eastern Bloc													.780**	.174
Variances														
Variance level 1 (individual)	.073**	.000	.072**	.000	.072**	.000	.063**	.000	.062**	.000	.062**	.000	.062**	.000
Variance level 2 (country)	.006**	.002	.006**	.001	.006**	.002	.005**	.001	.007**	.002	.389**	.105	.240**	.066
Variance left-right placement									.000**	.000	.000**	.000	.000**	.000
Variance emotional national identity									.012**	.003	.012**	.003	.012**	.003
-2 log likelihood														
Improvement	27338.445		25612.697		25159.325		9784.480		8155.938		7382.561		7367.216	
			1725.748		453.372		15374.845		1628.542		773.377		15.346	

Source: Eurobarometer 62.0, 63.4, 64.2, 65.2, 66.1 (2004/2005/2006), added contextual characteristics.

Notes: ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.10; ~ p < 0.10. N_i=122,484, N_j=29.

Concerning political orientations, people were asked to place their ideological political views in a continuum ranging from left-wing (1) to right-wing (10). As McLaren suggests, ‘individuals on the left appear to be more open to changes in society’ (2001:89). This would make them feel more positive about the macro-political changes involved in European integration than their rightwing counterparts. Conversely, models 2, 3, and 4 suggest that people with right-wing orientations express a *stronger* cultural identification with Europe than people on the left. McLaren explains such relations by saying that *economically* leftist individuals might object to the ‘capitalist’ nature of the EU (McLaren 2002:562). However, this should not necessarily have an impact on people’s *cultural* identification with Europe, as this explanation explicitly refers to the European Union rather than Europe as a cultural concept. An answer to this issue could be derived from the historical development of civic and cultural identification that I described above, as it suggests that the European Union might in fact have taken over some of the symbolic associations with ‘Europe’ as a broader concept (and vice versa).

I contend that European and national identifications are not (necessarily) mutually exclusive, as I have argued above. If this holds true, then an individual’s identification with his or her nation(s) should not have a significant negative impact on their identification with Europe. In fact, building on Duchesne and Frognier (2008),⁸ I expect that a strong identification with the nation has a *cumulative* relation to European identification. This expectation is indeed supported by the analysis, as models 4 through 7 show. In fact, the greatest improvement in model fit occurs when the national identity variables are included.

Fear of *losing* one’s national identity to ‘Europe’, on the other hand, has a significant negative impact on European cultural identification. This can be explained by considering which cognitive associations a respondent might have when answering questions such as these. If a respondent is asked to rate his/her attitude towards Europe ‘out of the blue’, the reported attitude is likely to be more positive than when the same individual is confronted with a similar question, but in explicit opposition to the nation. If the nation is explicitly placed in opposition to Europe, then ‘Europe’ becomes a threat, while if the nation is not mentioned in the question these ‘nested’ levels of identity do not exclude each other (*cf.* Duchesne and Frognier 2008:154-55).

3.1.2 National characteristics

I chose to estimate national identity and the respondent’s subjective left-right placement as a random effect (see Snijders and Bosker 1999) from model 5 onwards. This means that instead of estimating a ‘fixed’ effect for these variables *across* countries, the effect of these variables is estimated *within* countries. The variance results for model 5 indicate that even if we allow the effect of national identification to be different for every country, an emotional attachment to the country is still more likely to go together with a stronger sense of European identity.

Subjective left-right placement should be expected to have different results in various European countries, because being ‘left-wing’ is likely to mean something entirely different in post-socialist and western European countries. While inhabitants of the latter may often equate leftist ideology with political correctness, citizens of the former are likely to associate it with their communist pasts (on collective memory, see Assmann 2002; Halbwachs 1992). This indeed holds true in the present analysis, as the variance across countries is highly significant. This argument is further supported by the fact that all regression models that include left-right placement as a *random* effect do not show a significant effect of the *main* variable for left-right placement, while the models with this variable as a *fixed* effect do.

When it comes to civic identification, it is often argued that the longer a country is a member of the EU, the more people feel to be citizens of this polity (Anderson and Reichert 1996; Bruter 2005a:31; Greenstein 1965; Hix 2005; Inglehart 1971; Lubbers and Scheepers 2007:649). However, I argue that the opposite is likely to be true when it comes to *cultural* identification; that citizens of countries that have been a member of the EU for a relatively long period are actually *less* likely to express a cultural European identity. I suggest that individuals in ‘old’ member states may have grown to take ‘Europe’ at their doorstep for granted. Unhindered border passage, for example, has been a reality in many of these countries for a great number of years. Grand ‘ideals’ of the European project such as peace and prosperity have mainly been achieved in most if not all of the ‘old’ member states, for over a generation (or two). Conversely, several of the ‘newer’ members have quite a recent history of external suppression and less than ideal economic circumstances. For them, wanting to ‘belong’ to Europe may still have the connotation of these grand ideals that may well have faded away in ‘older’ member states. Additionally, a civic identity may ‘take over’ from the former cultural identification with Europe, in a way ‘channelling’ identification through a formalised ‘state-like’ conception (see above). As models 6 and 7 show, a

longer membership period indeed *decreases* people's cultural identification with Europe, supporting the above arguments.

Finally, the post-socialist past of many current EU member states is inherently present in people's political conceptions, and cannot be ignored in this analysis. Many might see their country's association with 'Europe' as instrumental in their differentiation from Russia, asserting independence from their former oppressor. If this is true, people in post-socialist countries will identify more strongly with the concept of 'Europe'. In my analysis, people from the former USSR territories (the Baltic countries) do not convincingly differ from the former USSR satellites, but do 'hint' towards culturally identifying more strongly with Europe. Furthermore, people from the former USSR satellite states (e.g. Poland) generally express significantly lower levels of cultural identification with Europe than people who are not from former Eastern Bloc countries. This result is not completely consistent with what I would expect to encounter based on my argument above. Nevertheless, bearing in mind that these effects are controlled for the effect of the number of years of EU membership,⁹ this result once again suggests that a civic identification with the EU has begun to 'take over' a part of people's cultural identification with 'Europe'.

4 Polish Higher Educated Youth: Qualitative Findings¹⁰

While the analysis of *Eurobarometer* survey data offers an excellent way to gain insight into which people in which countries identify with Europe, it does far less to help us understand what being European 'means'. For an in-depth analysis of European identification, I decided to focus on Polish higher educated youth. During the fieldwork period in which I gathered my qualitative data (October 2007-February 2008), I spent my time observing and talking to members of this specific group, and trying to understand their view of Europe and Poland. I interviewed them, but I also carefully observed their behaviour, and participated in their social events (cf. Spradley 1979, 1980). I decided to analyse this specific group based on a number of arguments, which could be summarised as 'critical case sampling' or 'theoretical sampling' (Teddlie and Yu 2007:80-83). This purposive sampling strategy complements the probability sampling approach of the quantitative research style, grounding the overall project in a 'sequential mixed methods sampling' approach (Teddlie and Yu 2007:90-91).

I have organised this section into two main themes that arose from the analysis of the interview data. Both themes together show how the Polish higher educated youth that I interviewed constructed their European identity, and how cultural (e.g. shared historical experiences) and civic (e.g. EU accession) memories and events played a role in this.

First, I will discuss the way in which my informants defined their own identity by setting social boundaries based on generational difference rather than nationality. This difference was expressed through a conception of a 'communist heritage', and came to the fore quite explicitly during the 2007 national elections. After that, I will continue with the second theme of this section, which deals with the concept of 'Central Europe', which was predominantly used to express social change because it allowed for the continuous blurring of boundaries between East and West, past and future.

4.1 The 'Student Generation' and the 'Communist Heritage' in Polish Politics

The Polish youth that I interviewed saw themselves as members of the generation that will deal with Poland's difficult past and that will rise above the disagreements that Europeans have had in the past. The only problem in achieving this, however, was that—according to them—they are 'stuck' with this 'old generation' who is 'still afraid' of Europe because they are submitted to the yoke of a 'communist mindset'. My informants would often describe such mindsets as 'remnants from the past' that have yet to be overcome. A 'communist heritage' that was not really 'supposed' to be present in Polish society, but that was introduced almost through a 'historic anomaly' (see Kundera 1984; Mach 1997; Pelkmans 2006:220; Verdery 1996, 1999:112; Wedel 2001).

[There are] problems that we have to combat. Because there is something like a heritage of communism. We have to get rid of it. Sometimes there is still this mentality within people, because some people have grown up and have learned some kind of thinking during communism. [Such as] attitude to life, expectation from the state. Not taking their life in their own hands, just expecting that everything will be given to them, ... also the lack of politeness. I think that is something like the heritage of communism. Ignorance, maybe.

—Monika

When asked whether this 'communist thinking' is present in all people's minds equally, Monika replied that among the younger generation, it is 'not so visible, but it's still in the people, because they are brought up in the company of their parents, who are just used to do it' (see Assmann 2002). However, when asked whether she practices this 'communist thinking' herself because of this, she replied that:

When you travel a lot, study abroad, meet with people, you have a different experience. A different way of thinking. ... Maybe you feel just the thing that you are more conscious about what you can do with your life.

—Monika

Most informants explicitly defined themselves as a 'generation' that travels a lot, learns other languages, and can be open to other cultures because they are *confident* of their own national identity. This enabled them to be 'open to Europe' as well, whereas they felt that the 'older generation' was 'still closed' to Europe.

This older generation is still afraid of [Europe]. Because there is this wars, and they are still afraid of wars, and this communist regime in Poland. And we younger people we are more confident. We want to travel, to know other cultures, other nationalities, kitchen, haha. It's not a problem for us.

—Teresa

This differentiation between themselves as people for whom the past is 'not a problem' on the one hand, and the 'others' as people who are 'still' struggling with communist and WWII memories on the other, resembles closely what Morawska has called the 'it does not matter anymore' and the *trudna polskosc* ('difficult Polishness') orientations (2003:176). It should be noted here that in fact, students or higher educated youth in general are not the only group in Polish society that travels across Europe on a large scale. In recent years, members of the Polish working class have travelled to Western Europe extensively to find jobs there (and potentially return to Poland later on), and in some respects their experiences may show a number of parallels. Unfortunately, it would go beyond the scope of this paper to offer a comparative analysis of these two distinct layers of society, and a more extensive fieldwork period would be required. Nevertheless, such a comparison is the explicit subject of a follow-up study that is currently being developed.

The difference between these 'generations of Polishness' and how they are divided on 'European' issues clearly came to the fore during the election for the *Sejm* in October 2007. According to my informants, the people in the 'old generation' consistently support the Law and Justice (PiS) political party, which put the Kaczynski twins on the posts of Prime Minister and President of Poland between 2005 and 2007. In their eyes, the politicians of such parties represent a large, xenophobic, 'closed', religious, and conservative majority that 'doesn't think'. Moreover, my informants maintained a frame of 'Othering' towards all things this 'old' political style symbolised to them; conservatism, euro-scepticism, amateurism, and misrepresentation abroad. While these aspects represented a social class with a purely national orientation, they saw themselves as part of a 'European' social class with the privilege of being able to look at Poland from a small distance and see all things in need of improvement.

That is [a] thing that I'm ashamed of. In our country, everything is working so badly. The government, the plans, construction, they are working so slow, they are not working properly. Everywhere you go, everything is not well organised. You know, you go to the best hotels and the service is horrible.

—Monika

It happens all the time. All the time. I feel ashamed of Poland every time I take up a foreign newspaper like *The Economist*, *Der Spiegel* ... any important foreign newspaper. ... Most of the time, when I read any of these foreign newspapers, I would say that I am ashamed of Polish politicians, and the general Polish public. ... They should not behave like this. They should behave like *professional* politicians. They should behave like everyone around us.

—Marcin, emphasis in original

For my informants, 'Europe' clearly was a very important issue in the political debate surrounding the elections (see also Millard 1999), and they would explicitly distance themselves from the government of 'the twins' (PiS) and this 'kind of thinking' by representing themselves to be of another generation. This is exemplified by Szymon's response to the suggestion that EU membership may rob Poland of its national identity:

It is the same way of thinking as my grandpa. And they ... I don't know. ... How can you, the Netherlands, Germany, France, influence Poland? *How?* [rhetorical] We have our nationality.

We are *Polish*. We have got our own culture, we are different, we will not lose it because, you know, we've got open borders and it's easier to invest in our country.

—Szymon (emphasis in original)

Needless to say, most of my informants were quite relieved that the Civic Platform (PO) party won the elections, as Julia states: 'I was really proud of Poles during [these] elections. ... This is the first time that I really saw people reacting to the whole craziness in the political world'. Nevertheless, even with the apparent lack of sympathy for PiS and all that it symbolised among the youth around me and other higher educated people I met, the party still managed to get 32.11 per cent of the vote. This is actually 5.11 percentage points *higher* than in the 2005 elections. Suffice it to say that the Polish political context paints a somewhat divided picture. Support for the EU, but also an identification with Europe, is intrinsically connected with this political, social and generational gap.

4.2 Central Europe and the Return to 'Normality'

As Teresa pointed out in one of the quotes above, being part of 'Europe' is 'not a problem' because 'younger people are more confident', linking this attitude directly to a different perspective on historical events like the Second World War and Poland's communist period. Because of a relative detachment from Poland's difficult past (Morawska 2003:176), they as a 'generation' can be proud of Poland and embrace 'Europe' at the same time. However, with regard to the 'level' of Europeaness of Poles and Poland, my informants regularly expressed some doubt. Teresa's analysis of Polishness exposes this tension:

[I]t's a problem of Polish people that all the time we think that *Polish people are good*, we are the best. ... On the other hand *we are on the end of Europe*. On the other hand [still] *we are on that* [western] *side of Eastern Europe*; we are better than Russians or something like this. And when we are abroad in this eastern part of Europe, and we see something like [the 'destruction' of Polish heritage by Ukrainians, *author's note*] we think; 'how can they do that, we are so great!', so fantastic, so hmmm...

—Teresa, emphasis added

She explicitly opposes 'being good' to being 'on the end of Europe', suggesting a positive evaluation of *not* being 'on the end of Europe'. On the other hand, she indicates that Poland is on the western side of Eastern Europe, which—according to her—makes them 'better' than the 'real' Eastern Europeans (i.e. Russians and Ukrainians).

I argue that this 'somewhat marginal' position, but also the *move away* from this position is enacted through the reinvention of the concept of 'Central Europe'. Its predecessor, the German concept of *Mitteleuropa*, came into usage for the first time around the end of the nineteenth century (see Philipps 2008; Stirk 1994), but became disused in Western Europe following the end of the Second World War. Nevertheless, it continued to have a place in intellectual circles in countries like the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland (Garton Ash 1989; Katzenstein 1997), and after the fall of communism came the gradual reinvention of the concept of 'Central Europe' (Rupnik 1990) as the area that 'geographically lies in the middle, culturally in the West, and politically in the East' (Kundera, quoted in Tomaszewski 2001:35).

With the Eastward expansion of the Western European sphere of cooperation, the meaning and definition of Central Europe shifted once more. Among my informants, there were two ways in which 'Central Europe' was defined. First, it was framed as a 'cultural area' with a shared historical experience, as Tomasz indicated:

We have the same historical experience [as] the Hungarians for example. ... And this makes us like, understand each other easier. But his does not make us totally different like a different world from other parts of Europe. Just a little closer, but not necessarily in a nostalgic way. I'm not saying that I like to spend time more with Hungarians than I do with Spanish. But if I go out or live with Hungarian people, some things are just easier to understand. Like I don't have to explain that I'm eating my meal to the very last drop, because I was raised in a country where food was hardly accessible. If I go to Hungary, it is obvious, but if I go to Spain, I may have to explain it.

—Tomasz

Second, and more importantly, perhaps, Central Europe was seen as not so much a distinctive category *per sé*, but rather as an expression of 'enduring liminality'; of being *neither* 'Eastern' *nor* 'Western'. Kamila phrased this quite strikingly: 'Central is what is not on the East or the West'. Differently put:

Central Europe would be exactly the area that was always asked whether it belongs to the East or to the West. And we don't know, so usually they said we are central. ... Because we are always asked whether we are pro-Russian or pro-European Union, we just say we're Central.

—Julia

This 'neither/nor' frame of Central Europe was expressed very often by my informants. They were neither Eastern, nor Western; *therefore*, they were Central. I argue that these blurry boundaries allowed my informants to use the concept of Central Europe to express *change*. They employed the concept in order to perform—and be part of—a shift from a difficult past (*trudna polskosc*) in 'the East' towards a 'better', cosmopolitan future as 'Europeans':

We used to be called Eastern Europe. ... But right now I think we are Central Europe. We are not like Ukrainians, Belarusians and so on. And we are not the same as Germany and Austria. We are in the middle. We are not like Eastern, we are not like Western.

—Szymon

This dynamic aspect of European 'areas' was often stated quite literally by my informants, conceptualizing Central Europe as the area that is 'not yet' at 'the same level' as Western Europe. When I asked people how to define Central Europe, they would often describe it using words like 'still', 'not yet', or 'catching up' before referring to what they saw as *Western* European qualities.

We are *still* not prepared for [a smoothly working society] I think. We are *still* sometimes *behind the rest of Europe*. We're *catching up*. It *takes some time until* we have the same standards, the same service, or just cultural stuff. ... We need to *catch up* some politeness to deal with people, because I *still* don't think we have a high standard in this. ... I was travelling and getting to know some other stuff in Germany, Austria, and I'm coming here [in Poland] and I'm disappointed and I'm noticing [these bad things]. I wasn't noticing it before. I wasn't *conscious* about it before. And learning new things, learning new places, I just noticed, *we are far behind the others*. ... It is *changing*, but very slowly, it *will take many years*.

—Monika, emphasis added

Following such changes (that may or may not be expected to *actually* happen), would be a redefinition of what is Eastern, Central, and Western Europe as well:

- Szymon: Have you heard our plans [ironically]? Our Prime Minister said that Poland will be another Ireland because of our economic growth. He promised. We'll see [sceptical].
- JM: What will happen to Poland if this will happen?
- Szymon: It will be more Western. The difference between countries like the Czech Republic and Poland compared to Ukraine and Belarus will be bigger and bigger.
- JM: Would you still call it Central Europe?
- Szymon: No [resolutely]. It will become Western Europe.

Here the economic discourse was mostly used to express a number of other qualities of Central Europe that are seen to be in flux. However, when discussing the subject further, many would indicate that being 'closer to the western part of Europe' actually means more than simply improving the country's economy. According to Anastazia, it also means 'to educate the young generation, to open up the borders, and increase the level of awareness to religions, customs, cultures. To be open-minded, to travel, live, and work in other countries'. My informants felt that they themselves as a 'generation' were the very fabric of this transformation, as Anastazia indicates:

Something *still* has to *change*, and we have to *run very fast to get to Europe*. Because it is our *point at the horizon where we want to be*. We want to be as good as Germany, France. As big, as important, as well know. Because we are not. We have big unemployment, poverty, a bad government. These things *should change*. But I think the new generation is on the right way to change it, so probably it will.

—Anastazia, emphasis added

'Getting to Europe', as Anastazia phrases it in the quote above, was conceptualised by my informants as a 'natural' process that would lead Poland 'back' to 'normality', ridding itself from the 'heritage of communism', and 'returning' to its place 'in Europe'. Central Europe's socialist experience was seen as 'deviating from "natural" Western history' (Pelkmans 2006:220; see also Wedel 2001).

Monika: Because people [in Poland nowadays] are travelling, they are more open, you know. ... They notice that their life is on a different level. They can afford more things, they... they have different standards of life, they are learning new things, they are more civilised.

JM: Is that a good direction for Poland to go?

Monika: To become more civilised? Yes, of course, haha.

JM: How would you feel about Poland becoming completely like Western Europe?

Monika: Yes. [I would like it] to become normal.

JM: Normal?

Monika: Hmhm [confirms].

On the road to 'normality', Poland's accession to the EU in 2004 as well as to the Schengen border union in 2007 were both conceived as clear moves in the right direction. This movement was seen as Poland becoming 'more European' (Julia), and therefore 'more civilised' (Monika). When I asked my informants how they felt about entering the EU and/or Schengen, they replied they felt more 'Western', more 'European' (Julia), and that they 'are more important now' (Wiktor).

I think after the access to the European Union, I felt more like Western or Central Europe than Eastern Europe. And sometimes when I hear about Poland as one of the countries of Eastern Europe, I say like 'hey! We're not in Eastern Europe!', haha! ... I remember when we were talking about [accession] we still had one leg in communism. ... It was very important for Poland to become a part of Europe. Not of Eastern Europe, or a Russian something.

—Julia

I can really remember that moment when Poland entered the European Union. I remember I felt that we were a little more European now too. ... Before, we used to be outside of Europe, now we were back in.

—Olga

I felt more normal [when Poland joined Schengen]. It's just that I felt that we were more civilised, you know. We are allowed to travel freely without treating us like a lower category national, and I feel really sorry for people who are trying to cross the Polish border, like Ukraine.

—Monika

When asked what would happen if Poland was to develop economically to the same level as Western Europe, they would say that it 'should' also become more 'polite', 'normal', and 'civilised'. Accession to the EU and Schengen were seen as (instrumental) steps towards a 'future' (Szymon) where Poland would be 'free of its past'.

5 Conclusion

With this article, I hope to have given a modest yet valuable contribution to the literature on the emerging European identity and to the community of scholars conducting mixed methods research. The conclusions in this work should be seen as supportive to Bruter (2003, 2004, 2005a) and other's (e.g. Smith 1991, 1992, 1995) analytical distinction between 'civic' and 'cultural' components of political identities. The quantitative and qualitative findings complement each other in a number of ways.

First, the variables included in the multilevel analysis of *Eurobarometer* data to measure age, education, left-right placement, and social group, relate to the discussions on Polish political discourse mentioned in the qualitative section. I found a significant negative relation between age and European cultural identification, as well as a positive relation between this identity component and the level of education. This, together with the fact that students (and managers) are the social group that identifies most strongly with Europe according to the quantitative analysis, indicates that especially the younger higher educated students feel emotionally attached to Europe.¹¹ This adds width to the qualitative findings, as it suggests that the transnational, European network of students that my informants often expressed to identify themselves with, actually does seem to relate to an empirical reality in a wider European context. Conversely, the quantitative findings are provided with depth regarding the Polish case and perhaps even cases that are historically similar, as it explicates the framework of national politics and the attitude towards Europe of the higher educated youth. It

offers an additional insight into the social dynamics underlying the ‘cold’ figures, because it explicates the social and historical framework in which such attitudes are conceived.

Second, Poland’s ‘return to Europe’ can be seen as part of a larger ‘reconfiguration’ of national and European identifications. While my qualitative investigation confronted me with young Poles enthusiastically embracing the possibilities that the ‘new’ Europe has to offer them, the quantitative analysis suggests that many people in the ‘older’ member-states actually seem to express lower levels of cultural identification with Europe. This might imply that European ‘core ideals’ such as peace and prosperity resonate more clearly with people in the ‘new’ member states than with those in the ‘old’ ones. In ‘old’ Europe, peace and prosperity might already be taken for granted after one or more peaceful and prosperous generations have passed. The discourse on the ‘communist heritage’ that my informants expressed confirms that this idea is indeed still very much alive. Moreover, ‘European ideals’ are seen as a way to ‘get rid of’ this problematic past, as they are seen to have the potential to ‘move’ Central Europe (and thereby Poland) Westwards, where they can finally be a ‘normal’ country again.

Finally, it should be stressed that if there is anything that both the qualitative as well as the quantitative analyses have shown in their own right, that is that national and European identity should *not* be conceptualised or measured as mutually exclusive social phenomena. In fact, both suggest that a strong emotional identification with the nation-state potentially *enforces* rather than prevents a cultural identification with Europe. Whether we are using quantitative or qualitative approaches, it is only when researchers like ourselves ask people to choose between *either* of these ‘nested’ identities, that people tend to select their nation as their collective identity. In their daily reality, however, such an exclusionist principle of identification is unlikely to exist.

6 Notes

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² Throughout this paper, I will use the words ‘identity’ and ‘identification’ interchangeably. In all cases, however, it refers to the social interaction and process of negotiation; to the *verb* rather than the *noun* (see Jenkins 2004:5; Mach 1993b:6).

³ *Standard Eurobarometer 68.0* (Fieldwork between September and November 2007).

⁴ Cronbach’s alpha is 0.729 for the civic scale and 0.738 for the cultural scale.

⁵ The data and graphs for other countries are available from the author on request.

⁶ I checked whether including either of the two national identity variables separately yielded different results, but in both cases the effect of age reversed. This reversal indicates a strong relation between age and national identification. Intermediate regression models are available from the author on request.

⁷ Whether this is due to a smaller effect from internationalisation for these groups or simply a matter of less cross-border flows altogether remains a question for follow-up research.

⁸ Even though this study did not yet include the ‘new’ EU member-states.

⁹ Moreover, the small change in $-2 \log \text{likelihood}$ of this final regression model is not a significant improvement upon the prior model. This implies that taking into account whether a country is a former USSR territory or satellite state does not significantly improve how well the model explains the variance of the dependent variable.

¹⁰ The names of informants in this section have been replaced by pseudonyms. In all, this section is based on qualitative interviews conducted with eighteen individuals who were generally contacted through student organisations and university services in Cracow and Lodz.

¹¹ I would like to note here that, even though the quantitative analysis shows that higher educated youth and students express the strongest cultural identification with Europe, there are other groups in Polish society that travel extensively across Europe. Especially working-class Poles who stay in other European countries for extended periods of time may therefore express similar attitudes. Unfortunately, the data gathered for this specific research project is not sufficient to thoroughly compare various highly mobile groups. I am happy to report, however, that I am currently engaged in a follow-up study that focuses on this very aspect and the comparison of different groups across a number of European nations.

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7 Biographical Note

Jeroen Moes holds an MSc from Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands, where he studied sociology and cultural anthropology and conducted research on national and European identifications among youth in Poland in a comparative perspective. After working at Utrecht University, the Netherlands for some time, he is now working as a PhD researcher at the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence, Italy. His research interests include Europeanisation, nationalism, cosmopolitanism, globalisation, collective identifications, social inequality, generational differences, youth and migration.

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